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THE EFFECTS OF CHILD PROTECTIVE INVESTIGATIONS ON
FAMILIES, CHILDREN, AND WORKERS IN UNSUBSTANTIATED CASES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Tara Elizabeth Agajanian

June 2001

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the possible effects that families, children, and child protective service workers experience when allegations of abuse and/or neglect are investigated and no abuse/neglect is found or further suspected. The study assessed the positive, neutral, and negative effects of such investigations on the worker's attitude, as well as what the workers believed the impact to be on the families. The participants were approximately 73 emergency/immediate response child welfare workers from San Bernardino and Riverside counties. The participants were given a questionnaire, which contained a demographic survey and a "Worker Attitude Scale", that they were asked to complete. Using a Likert scale, the questionnaire measured the worker's attitude and the effects on the family, regarding unfounded investigations.

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TO

My wonderful husband Scott, for marrying me while in graduate school, for your undying support, for your enduring patience, for making all of my days brighter, and for loving me as much as you do.

My Family for your love and support, for making me who I am today, and for so many reasons unspoken.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000) reports that in 1998 an estimated 2,806,000 allegations of child maltreatment were made, 66% of those allegations (1,851,960) were investigated, and approximately 903,000 children were found to be the victims of abuse and/or neglect. It is obvious from the previously mentioned statistics and basically an undisputed fact that there is a great need in our country to protect children from abuse and neglect, which is why child protective agencies are necessary and so vital to securing the safety of our children. However, the opposite side of this coin is investigations where the child abuse allegations that child protective workers must investigate, are unfounded. There is little concrete data on substantiation rates. Finkelhor (1990) points out that substantiation rates seem to fluctuate between forty to forty-nine percent, which suggests that fifty-one to sixty percent of child abuse allegations are unfounded or unsubstantiated.

While investigations by child protective agencies are necessary to protect children from abuse, Besharov (1990)

points out that they "may be a deeply traumatic experience for all members of the family." Drake (1996) notes that investigations from child protective agencies may place "harmful stress on the families involved" and that although the family may suffer trauma that was unintentional, it is still a serious negative consequence of investigating reports that end up being unfounded. Along with the family possibly suffering negative effects resulting from investigations where no abuse is found, the child protective worker may also be negatively affected. Giovannoni (1991) indicated that although unsubstantiated reports of child abuse have gained growing attention, there has been virtually no evaluation of such investigations from the child protective workers' perspective, and that their attitudes and opinions need to be examined, as well as those of the families.

An unfounded child abuse allegation obviously affects families, children, and the workers involved. However Hutchison (1993) points out that the State and the mandated reporters are also affected and are stakeholders in the matter. The State would have incurred unnecessary costs, and the mandated reporters' decision to report suspected abuse may be altered by not seeing any benefit from the

reporting. Also, the mandated reporters' relationship with the family they reported is impacted negatively.

It is apparent from this discussion that further research into the effects of unfounded child abuse investigations is needed. Of particular interest are the negative effects child protective workers feel that families and children endure from investigations of unfounded allegations, and the effects on the workers. This research will study the unintentional consequences resulting from unsubstantiated child abuse reports on families, children, and child protective workers. The researcher hopes to promote further exploration by other researchers about this subject matter, possibly heightening child protective workers' and agency's awareness of their own views on the topic as well as the potentially devastating effects that families may be experiencing from their investigations, and perhaps to encourage policy makers to create clearer guidelines and definitions regarding child abuse investigations.

The issues that will be addressed in this research project involve evaluating child protective workers' experiences, attitudes, and feelings regarding investigating cases in which child abuse allegations are

unfounded, as well as what the worker thinks the family experienced. Of interest is understanding how such investigations affect the workers; if the workers feel frustrated, relieved, productive, unproductive, satisfied, dissatisfied, essentially trying to determine if the workers have negative or positive responses to investigating such claims. Also of particular interest is how the workers perceive the clients as feeling, which will hopefully provide some insight into the possible experiences the clients might have. The study is trying to gain more knowledge about the families' experience with child protective services; if they feel traumatized, violated, protected, relieved. It is also trying to ultimately determine whether the families have a negative or positive response to coming into contact with child protective services.

The results of this study are intended to make child protective workers more aware of their own feelings as well as their clients' feelings when investigating abuse allegations. Hopefully by the child protective workers' becoming more aware of their feelings and the feelings of the families it will promote greater sensitivity toward families and acknowledgement of the families' rights. In

addition to the previously mentioned contributions to social work practice, this study also hopes to increase knowledge (possibly provide some clarification) on the subject of investigations since many scholars debate about whether or not child protective investigations are always traumatic to families involved.

This research specifically contributes to the body of knowledge regarding child welfare practice because it is addressing issues involving child protective services. The entire basis for the research is to improve child welfare services, particularly initial investigations, by promoting awareness of workers regarding their own feelings and attitudes as well as the families' perceived experience.

Research Question: The intent of this study is to examine the possible effects that families, children, and child protective service workers may experience when allegations of abuse are investigated and no abuse is found or further suspected. The study will be exploring and assessing the positive, neutral, and negative effects of such investigations on the worker's morale, attitude, and concerns about the system, as well as what the workers think to be the impact on the families.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a great need for solid research and exploratory studies to be conducted in order to discover the effects of child protective investigations, on families, children, and child protective workers when the allegations of child abuse are unable to be substantiated. There is little actual research on this topic, and in the small amount of research that can be found, the topic is only briefly mentioned in studies examining child protective agencies, and the over and under reporting of child abuse. Therefore, the majority of the articles cited are peripheral in nature, which further supports the argument that research is needed in this area of interest.

Although no exact theoretical perspective is directly mentioned in any of the articles they all address basic principles in case management theory. Rothman and Sager's (1998) model of case management, describes fifteen distinct phases of intervention, the initial two phases of the model are specifically what the following articles address. The first intervention phase involves "access to the agency"

which includes the outreach and referral system of an organization (Rothman and Sager, 1998). The second phase of intervention is termed "intake" which involves making biopsychosocial assessments and setting short and long-term goals with clients (Rothman and Sager, 1998). Obviously, when dealing with the issues of unfounded abuse, a referral must have been made in order for the family to have come into contact with the child protective agency, as well as an investigation to have ensued whereby a social worker completed an assessment in order to determine that the allegations were not founded. Many of the articles address screening policies when evaluating referrals and the need for clear guidelines regarding assessment, both of which are basic case management principles.

Douglas Besharov is a widely cited critic of unsubstantiated or unfounded reports of child maltreatment in the child welfare system. Besharov (1990) addressed the issue of effects or experiences families and children have with unfounded child abuse investigations in his analysis of the problems of over reporting and underreporting of child maltreatment to child protective agencies. Besharov (1990) indicated that child abuse investigations might be "a deeply traumatic experience for all members of the

family." Although the topic is briefly mentioned, the main focus of the article was in addressing the dynamics involved with over reporting and underreporting of child abuse, how such problems can be improved through enhancing the education of mandated reporters and the public, as well as upgrading screening capacities (Besharov, 1990). Overall the article provided good insight about the problems associated with reporting allegations of child abuse. However, it lacked any type of scientific methodology and was more a scholarly commentary providing a review of previous findings. In another commentary report, Besharov (1991) points out that child protective investigators should remember that allegations are only suspicions and "the parents' innocence should be presumed-unless evidence establishing the suspected maltreatment is obtained."

Besharov (1985) in his book, "The Vulnerable Social Worker: Liability for Serving Children and Families," indicated that child protective investigations could be considered or experienced by the families as being an invasion of privacy, harassment, defamation of character (suggesting that the parents or guardians are abusive or neglectful), a form of trespassing, and an interruption of

their interactions and relationships. Besharov (1985) also reported that families could see child protective workers as having created "intentional infliction of mental suffering" through their investigations of child abuse allegations.

David Finkelhor is a well-known opponent of Besharov's work. Finkelhor (1990) thinks that Besharov has created additional confusion regarding substantiation versus unsubstantiation. Finkelhor (1990) argued that in cases that are unsubstantiated, children and families often experience trauma and invasion of privacy from investigations. Although Finkelhor's (1990) article was primarily concerned with addressing the rate at which child abuse is reported to refute Besharov's argument regarding the over reporting and unsubstantiation of child abuse, it did indicate that at this time the actual situation of whether families and children are "traumatized" by unfounded child protective investigations has not been determined. Finkelhor (1990) went on to note that there is some research and evidence that suggests that child protective investigations are not harmful to families, however he did not make any reference of or cite any such studies. Finkelhor (1990) did admit that good research has

not been done in this area and is in great need. Overall the article appeared to lack any sort of formal methodology, as no actual experiment or study was conducted. The article was in essence a rebuttal of Besharov's work.

In an article analyzing the costs and benefits of child protective laws for children, families, professionals, and the state, Hutchison (1993) suggested that child abuse investigations are harmful intrusions into families' lives. Hutchison (1993) noted that families often experience anxiety as a result of the investigation, and suffer embarrassment or negative effects of having people in their support systems become aware of the fact that the state is questioning their parenting, which is rarely forgotten by either party. Children, as well as their families, may also experience social stigmatization and/or trauma as a result of the child abuse investigation (Hutchison, 1993). In addition, Hutchison (1993) stated, "ethics prevents research that examines the outcomes for families of unsubstantiated investigations." This article was not of an empirical nature and merely an annotation of child protective laws, costs, and benefits.

Along similar lines to the previous article discussed, is an article discussing the issue of child abuse allegations in foster families (Carbino, 1991). Carbino (1991) reported that child protective service investigations of child abuse allegations are traumatic for foster families and often leave the family in a state of shock and isolation, while feeling stigmatized. Child protective workers reported seeing the effects of the investigation as "anger, resentment, confusion, and ambivalence from foster parents during and after a report" (Carbino, 1991). Although Carbino (1991) points out that legally foster families are different from biological families, and are treated somewhat differently during an investigation of child abuse allegations, it is quite reasonable to assume that the effects and lasting impact of the investigation on the families would be similar. In both circumstances or family types, the family must be questioned, share private family matters with workers, and realize that their parenting abilities and character are being closely examined. Therefore, they experience similar dynamics and should encounter similar effects of investigations.

Methodologically the Carbino (1991) article was weak, even though it did contain a methods section, which discussed the instrument that was utilized. The purpose of the survey was to discover the State human service agencies that provided some sort of action to deal with the effects of child abuse allegations and investigations on foster families, and exactly what type of actions were taken (Carbino, 1991). The study then provided interpretation of the findings, analysis of policy, and recommendations for future changes (Carbino, 1991). Furthermore, the study did not address sampling type, or validity issues, and the methodology was not thorough.

Another article, Drake (1996) which argues that some type of maltreatment is present in the majority of unsubstantiated reports, proposes a harm/evidence (H/E) model. Drake (1996) suggested that the widely accepted idea of unsubstantiated reports as needless intrusions into families' lives cannot be validated by statistical data. Drake (1996) notes that although child protective reports and investigations may be seen by mandated reporters as adding unnecessary stress on families, that in actuality little or no proof exists to support the notion that investigations of unsubstantiated allegations are unfair or

traumatic to the families involved. No actual research study was conducted in the article, however, the author did provide an in-depth analysis of previous studies involving substantiation of child abuse reports by child protective services, to support his argument that often maltreatment is present in "unsubstantiated" cases, some minimal services are provided, and clearer definitions and criteria of substantiation and unsubstantiation are needed.

In an article summarizing research findings on forensic interviewing and the suggestibility of children, Reed (1996) indicates the importance of investigations coming to a true conclusion. Reed (1996) briefly mentioned how important it is for child abuse investigators to uncover the truth, because errors can lead innocent people's "reputations, relationships, financial security, and personal freedoms" to be jeopardized. However, previously mentioned studies indicated how the mere investigation of child abuse allegations might create such circumstances for those under investigation.

David Hechler's (1988) book entitled "The Battle and the Backlash: The Child Sexual Abuse War" discusses the state of child welfare agencies and addresses some of the "backlash" or criticisms that are directed at child

protective services. Hechler (1988) cites many renowned critics such as Besharov and Finkelhor, and although he highlights and acknowledges some of their criticisms of the child welfare system. He points out critics have reported that the investigations that are determined to be unfounded are "unjustified violation[s] of parental rights," that "hundreds of thousand of innocent people are having their reputation tarnished and their privacy invaded" (Hechler, 1988). Although Hechler (1988) cites many critics and their arguments he does indicate that his review of the "backlash" is more a discussion about what is unknown and that more information or knowledge is needed in this area.

Richard Wexler's (1990) book, "Wounded Innocents: The Real Victims of the War Against Child Abuse," also discusses the effects of child abuse investigations on families. Wexler (1990) cites numerous case examples of child abuse investigations being extremely traumatic and unfair to the families involved, only to later be unable to substantiate any abuse. The cases he refers to involve gross violations of parental rights, where parents claim they were called liars and directly accused of abusing their children, investigators and sheriffs threatened to break doors down, numerous and unnecessary physical and

psychological examinations (described as inter-rogations), strip-searching children, having children wrongfully removed, and upon the children returning the family is completely devastated (Wexler, 1990). Overall, Wexler (1990) appeared to be a strong supporter of the families accused of child abuse and critic of child protective investigators, adding that "there is no such thing as a 'harmless' child-abuse investigation" and that child protective service workers "have been trained not to investigate and find out if maltreatment occurred, but to assume that it did and then try to prove it."

This study followed the research design of Jeanne Giovannoni (1991) who examined the beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of child protective workers regarding the problem of unsubstantiated child abuse reports. Giovannoni (1991) interviewed 117 workers from three states, to assess "screening issues," "substantiation issues," "agency priorities," "worker's subjective experiences," "why reports are not validated," "information given in reports," "improving reporting from agencies and private individuals," and "services rendered during investigation." The majority of the child protective workers reported different levels of discomfort when asked how they felt

when they had investigated a report that was not validated (Giovannoni, 1991). The workers expressed having feelings of uneasiness, frustration, embarrassment, guilt, worry, relief, and most often some combination of two emotions, with a wide range of reasons for each emotion (Giovannoni, 1991). Due to the nature or topic of this literature review and project, only the findings regarding the "worker's subjective experiences" are relevant; however the Giovannoni (1991) study was much more in depth. The research conducted by Giovannoni (1991) was by far the most methodologically stringent that this researcher has been able to find as of yet. However, it was initially part of a larger project, from which just the opinion survey was extracted, to guide this study. Giovannoni (1991) addressed her methodology, limitations of sampling and generalizability, and intention of exploratory research.

Case management theory was used as the theoretical perspective that guided this research. Case management theory was the most appropriate perspective to use in order to address issues involving referrals or intake procedures and assessments accurately, for the initial investigations that child protective service agencies complete. Due to the fact that this research examined aspects of child

protective services, it was only practical to use the theory that child protective agencies operate under, which is case management theory.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This research was primarily exploratory in nature, and is intended to serve as a catalyst for further investigations about the consequences of child abuse investigations. The objective of the study was to determine some of the effects of child protective service investigations on families, children, and the workers, when the allegations are determined to be unfounded and no abuse and/or neglect is further suspected. In addition, it is hoped that data yielded from the research will determine whether investigations that result in unsubstantiated/unfounded results are experienced overall, as a positive, neutral, or negative experience for the worker and family involved. There appears to be much controversy surrounding this topic, and prominent researchers in this field believe further research is needed.

The post-positivist paradigm was utilized in this research project. The post-positivist paradigm is most appropriate because, this research is small in scale, there are many variables that cannot be controlled, and the goal was to merely find associations, not prove relationships,

between variables. The researcher hopes to encourage further investigation into this subject matter by conducting this study. The research design utilized was more subjective in nature, than seen in other designs.

It is hoped that the data yielded from this study will facilitate further studies and explorations about the effects of child protective investigations on families, children, and workers when allegations are unfounded or unsubstantiated. The findings from this research are intended to heighten child protective agency and worker awareness of the dynamics involved to both themselves and families when child abuse allegations are investigated and unfounded. There is a definite need to determine the effects of such circumstances, on all parties involved, before the situation can be properly assessed for improvements and/or solutions to any problems created from such instances.

If the results indicate that workers are affected negatively by investigating child abuse allegations that are unfounded, or they feel the families/children are affected negatively, then an argument could be made that changes in the child welfare system or screening process need to occur, to prevent the consequences of such

investigations. If the child welfare system is responsible for causing unintended harm to families, through their investigations, then it could be suggested that they be responsible for rectifying the situation, possibly by issuing formal apologies or offering counseling services to families who have a difficult time processing the investigation or feel violated. In addition to services for the families, the workers who are negatively affected should also have some sort of support group or forum to discuss their concerns about this matter. Whatever the outcome may be, the study is intended to heighten agency and worker awareness about this issue.

Methodologically, this study has several limitations. First, the instrument was created by the researcher and this is the first time it has been used, therefore there is no previous information on the validity or reliability of the survey. Second, the sampling method, which is a convenience sample of emergency/ immediate response workers from two Southern California counties, limits the generalizability of the results. Third, the information regarding the family's experience of child protective investigations did not come from the primary source which is the families, but instead from the worker's perceptions

of the family's experience was, therefore this information is to be interpreted cautiously due to the fact it is essentially hearsay and is open to bias. Fourth, it is unknown how social desirability issues may have impacted the workers' responses and this could not be controlled for.

Due to the nature of the population being examined, specifically regarding confidentiality issues, it was not possible to sample the children and families involved with unfounded investigations. Instead, a cluster sample of emergency/immediate response child protective service workers was gathered from various department of social services offices in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. Only workers who were currently assigned to the emergency/immediate response units was surveyed because they are the workers most likely to have completed an initial investigation of child abuse/neglect where the allegations have been unfounded/unsubstantiated. The effects of the investigations on the families was based solely on the emergency/immediate response workers' interpretation of what the family experienced. It should be noted that these interpretations are speculative, and therefore susceptible to biased perception. However, these workers are the next

best source to understanding what families experience during investigations since it was not possible to contact the families directly. The information provided by the workers regarding their personal experience was not expected to be limited or biased, in that it is from the primary source.

Consent was obtained from the child welfare agencies for the workers to participate, prior to visiting and/or contacting the individual locations and distributing the survey. The research attempted to have a sample size between 75 to 100 participants. A non-probability sampling method was utilized due to time constraints, and accessibility factors involved. A convenience sample of child protective service workers, from San Bernardino and Riverside Counties were contacted to participate in the study. A list of the emergency/immediate response workers from both counties was obtained and participants were either contacted personally (by going to the offices where they worked to distribute the survey with an attached self addressed stamped envelope) or by inter-office mail (the survey was distributed with a self addressed stamped envelope). A total of 71 questionnaires were distributed to Riverside County emergency response social workers and

89 questionnaires were distributed to San Bernardino County intake workers, for child protective services. Seventy three questionnaires were returned to the researcher by mail, due to the lack of responses on one of the questionnaires, only 72 questionnaires were analyzed in the results. It is unknown as to how many workers from either San Bernardino or Riverside Counties participated, due to the fact that the participants were not advised to specify which county they were currently working for or any other identifying information except for on the Demographic Scale.

Due to the fact that this study was exploratory in nature the researcher did not clearly define what the dependent and independent variables were initially and instead only speculated as to whether any variables will be associated. The speculated independent variables were those indicated on the demographic scale (gender, age, educational level, ethnicity, length of employment, and number of children) and the speculated dependent variables will be the attitudes of the social workers toward unsubstantiated/unfounded child abuse investigations.

The survey contains nominal, continuous, and ordinal variables. The nominal variables that were measured are

gender, ethnicity, and education level. The continuous variables that were measured are age, length of employment, and number of children. The workers' attitudes and perceptions, which were be measured using a Likert scale, are ordinal variables. A Demographic Scale (see Appendix B) and Worker Attitude Scale (see Appendix C), both of which were created by the researcher, was used to measure the variables.

The instruments that were utilized in this research consists of a Demographic Survey and a Worker Attitude Scale. The Demographic Survey is composed of questions that obtain the participants' gender, age, level of education, ethnicity, length of employment as a child protective services worker, and the number of children the participant has. The survey required the participant to either place a check mark next to the description that describes their attribute or write in an answer. An informed consent (see Appendix A) and debriefing statement (see Appendix D) were also included with the questionnaire.

The Worker Attitude Scale consisted of a brief, fictitious, vignette about a worker who investigates a child abuse allegation that results in an unsubstantiated/unfounded conclusion, which the participant was asked to

read. After reading the vignette the participant was asked to reflect on a personal experience they have had that is similar to the one in the vignette. Once the participant has had time to reflect they were then to proceed to the questions. There are a total of 18 statements, nine statements relate to the worker's attitudes and perceptions, and nine of the statements relate to how the worker perceived the family's experience. The worker was asked to indicate with how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement based on a five point Likert scale provided above the statements. There are six positive, six negative, and six neutral questions for the participant to respond to attempting to gain an understanding of whether workers tend to view conducting such investigations (where the allegations are unsubstantiated/unfounded) as more positive, neutral, or negative.

There are currently no instruments, at least that the researcher is aware of, that address the issues the researcher is interested in, therefore the researcher created this instrument out of sheer need. The demographic instrument was created based on previous, generic demographic scales that are contained in most studies that

survey people. The Worker Attitude Scale was created based on the findings of Giovannoni's (1991) study that assessed the workers' subjective experiences regarding unsubstantiated reports. The Giovannoni (1991) study however did not use a survey; instead the researcher interviewed the workers face to face.

The questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher's colleagues and instructors, child protective service workers. The questionnaire was assessed for grammar, spelling, clarity, content, reading level, and to invite further suggestions for improvement. To pretest the instruments the researcher conducted a pilot study, in which approximately six graduate social work students were asked to review and complete the instruments, in order to further refine the questionnaire.

The anonymity of the participants was ensured due to the fact that the participants were not asked to identify themselves in any manner, but were simply asked to indicate whether or not they consented to participate in the study by placing a check mark in the designated space.

Initially, for distribution purposes only, the names of the participants from Riverside County was known to the researcher, however because the questionnaire does not ask

the participant to identify him/herself, and the participants mailed the completed questionnaire to the researcher, the identity of each participant was unknown. The researcher destroyed the list of participants' names that were obtained for distribution purposes, immediately following the distribution of the questionnaire to those individuals. There is no way for the researcher to know who did or did not participate in this study. Therefore, the information from the participants was gathered on an anonymous basis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The data collected from the questionnaires was input in the computer program "Statistical Program for the Social Sciences" (SPSS). The first data analysis that was conducted was to calculate the frequencies of the datum to determine mean, mode, median, and standard deviation for both the demographic information and the individual questions on the Worker Attitude Scale (WAS). Next, the data was subjected to a bivariate analysis. The bivariate analysis was used to determine which items on the questionnaire were variables, which items were constants, and the range of responses for each item. When variables were determined to be significant, they were then subjected to a cross tabulation analysis, in which a Pearson's r and Spearman's Rho were calculated in order to assess the two variables in relation to one another. Due to the fact that the Pearson's r produces a similar and/or stronger correlation coefficient, only the Pearson's R value is reported. The parametric correlations were conducted to determine the strength or significance of the relationship

between variables and to compare the means of the variables for significant differences/similarities.

A total of 72 questionnaires were returned to the researcher. Approximately 33.3% of the participants were male ($N = 24$) and 66.7% were female ($N = 48$). The age of the participants ranged from 24 to 58 years old, with the average age being 41.54 years old ($SD = 9.52$). Approximately 63.9% of the participants reported that the highest level of education attained was a Masters degree ($N = 46$), while 33.3% ($N = 24$) indicated they obtained a Bachelor degree, and only 2.8% ($N = 2$) reported achieving an Associates degree. Findings indicate that the majority of the participants were Caucasian (70.8%), however 13.9% of the participants were African American, 9.7% were Hispanic, 1.4% were Asian American, 2.8% reported being another race, and 1.4% did not indicate their ethnic background. The length of employment with CPS ranged from under one year up to 27 years, with the average number of years being 5.32 ($SD = 5.44$) (Please note that the data entered in the SPSS program was automatically rounded up by the program, with regards to the length of employment). Approximately 38.9% of the participants reported having no children, 20.8% reported having one child, 23.6% reported

having two children, 14% reported having between three and seven children, and 2.8% did not respond. The average number of children the participants reported parenting was 1.29 (SD = 1.49). The descriptive data, such as the frequency distributions for the categorical and ordinal variables obtained from the Demographic Scale are presented in Appendix E. The frequency distributions (specifically the means and standard deviations) for the responses on the Worker Attitude Scale is presented in Appendix F and will be further discussed in the discussion section. Appendix G contains an exact percentile categorization of responses on the Worker Attitude Scale.

The data analysis indicated that there were significant correlations between six of the questions on the WAS and information from the Demographic Scale. The significant findings are reported as Pearson's r correlation coefficients. There was a small negative correlation ($r = -0.25$, $p < .05$ (two-tailed)) between WAS 1 and gender, which means females did not "feel as though the investigation was a good or productive use of time" (WAS 1) in comparison to males. There was a small negative correlation ($r = -0.29$, $p < .05$ (two-tailed)) between WAS 2 and the race of the participant. African American

participants felt "frustrated that the referral was not able to be screened out" (WAS 2) more so than Caucasian participants. There was a small negative correlation ($\underline{r} = -0.26$, $\underline{p} < .05$ (two-tailed)) between WAS 6 and the race of the participant. African American participants agreed that they "felt neither pleased nor displeased with the investigation" (WAS 6) while Caucasians indicated that they disagreed with that statement. There was a small positive correlation ($\underline{r} = 0.26$, $\underline{p} < .05$ (two-tailed)) between WAS 8 and length of employment. There was a small positive correlation ($\underline{r} = 0.26$, $\underline{p} < .05$ (two-tailed)) between WAS 9 and length of employment. The longer the participant had been employed by CPS the more likely that they were to agree that they felt "impartial about the investigation" (WAS 9). Lastly, there was a medium negative correlation ($\underline{r} = -0.37$, $\underline{p} < .01$ (two-tailed)) between WAS 15 and the race of the participant. African American participants agreed that the "the family felt neither pleased nor displeased about being contacted" (WAS 15) while Caucasian participants disagreed with that statement. See Appendix H for a summary of the significant Pearson's r correlation coefficients.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study sought to inspect and/or discover some of the possible effects that workers and families might experience from being a part of a child abuse investigation in which the allegations are unfounded. This study built on the work of Giovannoni's (1991) study which looked at the beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of child protective workers regarding the problem of unsubstantiated child abuse reports and investigations. Although the Giovannoni (1991) study was much more in depth, the results of this study were not able to completely validate the findings of the exploratory Giovannoni (1991) study which found that workers expressed having feelings of uneasiness, frustration, embarrassment, guilt, worry, and relief when involved with an unsubstantiated/unfounded report.

Unfortunately, this study did not yield any strong correlations. However, among the six correlations found to be significant the correlation between the race of the participant and the participant's response to question fifteen of the Worker Attitude Scale was found to be medium. The first significant correlation coefficient was

found between the gender of the participant and how the participant responded to WAS 1. Female participants reported that they did not "feel as though the investigation was a good or productive use of time" (WAS 1) more than males. There could be numerous reasons why females more than males did not feel that investigating child abuse/neglect allegations that end up being unfounded/unsubstantiated was a productive use of their time. The researcher proposes that the difference in response could possibly be due to a gender difference in perception, between how helpful or useful one views themselves and what factors that person/gender believe to be necessary in order to be useful or helpful.

The second significant correlation coefficient was between the race of the participant and how the participant responded to WAS 2. African Americans reported feeling frustrated that child abuse/neglect referrals, which end up being unfounded or unsubstantiated, were not able to be screened out, more than Caucasian participants. In addition, African Americans also tended to indicate that they felt "neither pleased nor displeased with the investigation" and that they believed the family felt "neither pleased nor displeased about being contacted",

more than the Caucasian participants. One can only speculate about what could have contributed to the difference in response between these two groups. It should be noted that these findings were small significantly, and that there was five times as many Caucasian participants than there were African American participants.

Another significant correlation coefficient was found between the length of employment with CPS of the participant and how the participant responded to WAS 9. The longer the participant was employed by CPS the more likely they were to indicate that they felt impartial to the investigation. The researcher proposes that this suggests, that with experience and practice comes a certain amount of neutrality and lack of emotional response to such situations.

Lastly, a significant correlation coefficient was found between the length of employment with CPS of the participant and how the participant responded to WAS 8. It is unclear to the researcher as to what relationship exists between these two variables. Although it is logical to assume that as the length of employment of the participant increases the amount of responses indicating that the participant feels "guilty for intruding on the family's

privacy" would decrease, that is not exactly the finding. Approximately 74% of all of the participants indicated that they would not feel guilty for intruding on the family's privacy, while 4% indicated that they were undecided, and 22% indicated that they would feel guilty. Even when the length of employment was divided into categories such as zero to four years of employment, five to ten, and 11 to 27 the majority of participants in each category indicated that they would not feel guilty for intruding on the family's privacy.

Overall the responses of the participants, with regards to how they felt as a worker having to investigate abuse/neglect which results in an unsubstantiated/unfounded claim, were positive. Most participants did not feel frustrated that the referral was not able to be screened out ($\bar{M} = 2.59$, $\underline{SD} = 1.13$), suggesting that they are satisfied with the screening and intake process. As to be expected, most of the participants were relieved that there was no abuse/neglect found ($\bar{M} = 4.30$, $\underline{SD} = 0.83$). Most participants felt comfortable with how the interview/assessment proceeded ($\bar{M} = 4.18$, $\underline{SD} = 0.75$), which could suggest that they feel competent and effective at their job. Most of the participants did not feel guilty for

intruding on the family privacy ($\underline{M} = 2.40$, $\underline{SD} = 1.09$). In addition, most of the participants indicated that they did not feel impartial about the investigation ($\underline{M} = 2.93$, $\underline{SD} = 1.05$) and were not indifferent to the investigation/situation ($\underline{M} = 2.16$, $\underline{SD} = 0.96$) which could suggest that the workers are interested and invested in the work they do.

The average participant was however undecided as to whether the investigation was a good or productive use of time ($\underline{M} = 3.61$, $\underline{SD} = 1.21$). Most workers indicated that they did not feel sorry for taking up the family's time ($\underline{M} = 2.68$, $\underline{SD} = 1.21$) which could suggest various characteristics about the worker, depending on how one interprets the result. For instance, either the worker could be perceived as not valuing or respecting the family's time, or the worker could just be seen as having a clear understanding of the importance for the investigation.

Overall the responses of the participants, with regards to how they believed the family felt about the abuse/neglect investigation that they were subjected to (which resulted in an unsubstantiated/unfounded finding), were negative to neutral. The average participant did not

believe the family felt as though they benefited from the investigation ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.00$). Most participants did not believe the family felt either indifferent to the investigation ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 0.62$), neither pleased or displeased about being contacted ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.75$), or neither pleased or upset with the investigation ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.74$). This suggests that the workers believe the family did or would have a reaction to being subjected to a CPS investigation, and that the family did not feel as though they benefited from the investigation. An argument could be made that the worker(s) therefore are not adequately serving the public or are not providing them with a clear understanding as to the mission and purpose of the child protective investigations.

In addition, most participants reported being undecided as to whether they believed the family either felt embarrassed or humiliated ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.96$), glad that someone else was concerned about the safety/well-being of their child ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.91$), pleased that they (and/or CPS) was available if they needed help ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.84$), or felt as the their privacy was invaded ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.87$). This could suggest that possibly the questions were unclear or that the participants, who are

investigative workers, are not able to decipher their client's emotions and reactions well enough to make a determination on how the family experienced the investigation. Most participants also indicated that they were undecided as to whether they believed the family will question their parenting style and/or abilities ($\underline{M} = 2.98$, $\underline{SD} = 0.89$).

It should be noted that this study did have several limitations. First, the instrument was created by the researcher specifically for this study and has not been normed, therefore the validity and reliability of the instrument has not been established. Second, the study had a relatively small number of participants ($\underline{N} = 72$), of which the majority of them were Caucasian, and were employed at only two County Child Welfare departments in Southern California. Lastly, the study was only exploratory and nature, a specific hypothesis was not predicted by the researcher. The researcher attributes these limitations as to possibly why no additional significant relationships, correlations, or stronger findings were revealed.

It is recommended that further investigation into the effects of unsubstantiated/unfounded child abuse/neglect

investigations and allegations, on workers and families continue. It appears as though there is not clear evidence or understanding as to how CPS investigations effect families and workers when the allegations result in an unsubstantiated or unfounded finding. This researcher recommends the development of an instrument(s) that further addresses or uncovers workers' attitudes, regarding investigating child abuse/neglect allegations which result an unfounded/unsubstantiated conclusion, to better assess the workers' feelings on the matter in order to promote worker retention and job knowledge. In addition, it is recommended that an instrument and/or method for directly questioning the families involved in such investigations, as to what their experience was like, for the purpose of attaining information on public satisfaction (with CPS), perceived worker competence and effectiveness, and to possibly identify areas which require improvement in the field of child welfare.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

The study in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate worker attitudes and perceptions. This study is being conducted by Tara Agajanian under the supervision of Dr. Camille Reineke. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University San Bernardino. The department and the university require that you give your consent before participating in this study.

In this study you will be asked to complete scales designed to measure your attitudes regarding child abuse investigations. The study will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes of your time. The anonymity of your responses will be closely guarded. All data will be reported in group form only. There are no fore-seeable risks to you as a participant in this study.

Please understand that your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time during this study, without penalty, or remove any data you have provided during this study. In order to ensure the validity of the study, we ask you not to discuss this study with others.

If you have any questions about the study, please free to contact Tara Agajanian or Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507.

By placing a mark in the space provided below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and freely consent to participate. By this mark I further acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Give your consent to participate by marking a check or 'X' mark here:

Today's date is _____

APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC SCALE

Demographic Scale

1. Gender (Please check one)

MALE_____ FEMALE_____

2. Age (Please indicate your age in years in the space below).

3. Highest Educational Level Completed (Please check one).

High School Diploma _____ in _____

AA/AS Degree _____ in _____

BA/BS Degree _____ in _____

MA/MS/MSW Degree _____ in _____

Doctorate Degree _____ in _____

4. Race/Ethnicity (Please check one).

African American _____

Asian American _____

Caucasian _____

Hispanic _____

Other (please specify) _____

5. Length of Employment (Please indicate how long you have worked for child protective services in the space below).

6. Family Information (Please indicate how many children you have in the space below).

APPENDIX C

WORKER ATTITUDE SCALE

Worker Attitude Scale

Please read the brief vignette presented below.

You receive a referral to investigate an allegation of child abuse and/or neglect made from an anonymous source. The family has no prior CPS case that you are aware of after searching the appropriate databases/files. You take a county vehicle and drive to the client's home. The family is at home when you arrive, you explain why you have come to their home and that you will need to speak with them. You are invited in and begin your investigation. The family is cooperative and you are able to complete your interview/assessment in a timely manner. You find no evidence of any type of abuse, in your opinion the family needs no further services, and your professional judgment is that the child was not abused/neglected nor do you suspect that the child is at risk for abuse in the future. You return to the office to write the report and close the case.

Please take a moment to reflect back on a child protective services (CPS) investigation that you completed, (possibly similar to the one described in the vignette), which the allegations were unsubstantiated and/or unfounded.

Now please indicate with how well you agree or disagree with the following statements, on a scale of one to five.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

1. I feel the investigation was a good or productive use of time_____
2. I feel frustrated that the referral was not able to be screened out_____
3. I feel indifferent to the investigation/situation_____
4. I feel relieved that there was no abuse/neglect_____
5. I feel sorry for taking up the family's time_____
6. I feel neither pleased nor displeased with the investigation_____
7. I feel comfortable with how the interview/assessment proceeded_____
8. I feel guilty for intruding on the family's privacy_____
9. I feel impartial about the investigation_____

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

10. I believe the family felt as though they benefited from the investigation_____
11. I believe the family felt embarrassed or humiliated_____
12. I believe the family felt indifferent to the investigation_____
13. I believe the family felt glad that someone else was concerned about the safety/well-being of their child_____
14. I believe the family will now question their parenting style and/or abilities_____
15. I believe the family felt neither pleased nor displeased about being contacted_____
16. I believe the family felt pleased that I (and/or CPS) was available if they needed help_____
17. I believe the family felt as though their privacy was invaded_____
18. I believe the family felt neither pleased nor upset with the investigation_____

APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Debriefing Statement

The study you have just completed was designed to investigate worker attitudes and perceptions. In this study three types of attitudes were assessed: positive, negative, and neutral. The researcher was particularly interested in discerning what type of thoughts, feelings, or attitudes that workers have regarding child abuse investigations in which the allegations are unsubstantiated/unfounded, and overall if the responses were positive, negative, or neutral.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the attitude questions with other colleagues. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Tara Agajanian or Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507.

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHICS TABLE

Demographics Table

Variable	N	Percent	M	SD
Gender				
Male	24	33.3		
Female	48	66.7		
Age			41.54	9.52
24-35	22	30.7		
36-47	27	37.7		
48-58	23	32.0		
Education			3.61	0.54
HS	2	2.8		
BA/BS	24	33.3		
MA/S/MSW	46	63.9		
Race/Ethnicity				
African Am.	10	13.9		
Asian Am.	1	1.4		
Caucasian	51	70.8		
Hispanic	7	9.7		
Other	2	2.8		
Not Reported	1	1.4		
Employment			5.32	5.44
Under 2 yrs.	17	23.7		
2-4 years	24	33.5		
5-10 years	19	26.6		
11-27 years	12	19.6		
Children			1.29	1.49
None	28	38.9		
One	15	20.8		
Two	17	23.6		
3-7	10	14.0		
Not reported	2	2.8		

APPENDIX F

WORKER ATTITUDE SCALE (WAS) FREQUENCIES

Worker Attitude Scale (WAS) Frequencies

Question	M	SD
WAS 1	3.61	1.21
WAS 2	2.59	1.13
WAS 3	2.16	0.96
WAS 4	4.30	0.83
WAS 5	2.68	1.21
WAS 6	2.83	1.13
WAS 7	4.18	0.75
WAS 8	2.40	1.09
WAS 9	2.93	1.05
WAS 10	2.69	1.00
WAS 11	3.02	0.96
WAS 12	2.08	0.62
WAS 13	3.04	0.91
WAS 14	2.98	0.89
WAS 15	2.26	0.75
WAS 16	3.29	0.84
WAS 17	3.54	0.87
WAS 18	2.58	0.74

APPENDIX G

RESPONSE TO WORKER ATTITUDE SCALE (WAS) PERCENTAGES

Response to Worker Attitude Scale (WAS) Percentages

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
WAS 1	9.7	9.7	12.5	45.8	22.2
WAS 2	9.7	54.2	11.1	16.7	8.3
WAS 3	22.2	52.8	13.9	8.3	2.8
WAS 4	2.8		6.9	44.4	45.8
WAS 5	11.1	50.0	9.7	18.1	11.1
WAS 6	8.3	41.7	15.3	27.8	6.9
WAS 7	2.8	1.4		66.7	29.2
WAS 8	13.9	59.7	4.2	16.7	5.6
WAS 9	5.6	37.5	19.4	33.3	4.2
WAS 10	9.7	37.5	29.2	20.8	2.8
WAS 11	2.8	31.9	29.2	31.9	4.2
WAS 12	12.5	69.4	15.3	2.8	
WAS 13	1.4	31.9	30.6	33.3	2.8
WAS 14	1.4	33.3	33.3	29.2	2.8
WAS 15	9.7	62.5	19.4	8.3	
WAS 16		19.4	37.5	37.5	5.6
WAS 17		15.3	25.0	50.0	9.7
WAS 18	2.8	48.6	36.1	12.5	

APPENDIX H

SIGNIFICANT PEARSON'S R CORRELATIONS OF VARIABLES

Significant Pearson's R Correlations of Variables

Question	Variable	r	n
WAS 1	Gender	-0.25*	72
WAS 2	Race	-0.29*	71
WAS 6	Race	-0.26*	71
WAS 8	Employment	+0.26*	72
WAS 9	Employment	+0.26*	72
WAS 15	Race	-0.37**	71

*Significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

**Significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

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